



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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Education Must Adapt to Workforce Demands

By State Rep. Don Vruwink

As a teacher for over four decades and currently a member of the State Assembly Education Committee, I have seen many changes to our educational system, some to my liking and some not so much.

One thing I have seen is the importance of integrating technology into everyday classroom instruction. Twenty percent of jobs disappear in five years due to evolving technology and so schools must teach students to be prepared to adapt.

Lifelong skills in one occupation are far from the norm and will be increasingly rare for younger generations. It is the job of the schools to teach our students to adapt to an ever-changing workforce to meet society's demands.

Educators recognize that our workforce is not what it was 20 years ago and it will not be what it is 20 years from now. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the country saw 20 percent increases in job growth during the 1980s and 1990s. During the 2000s, job growth fell to 6 percent and so far in the 2010s, job growth has been 0 percent. This is alarming, but it is also very telling as to how technology has shaped job growth and our workforce.

Consider the impact Facebook, Uber and Airbnb have had on the workforce, which is also having a major impact on society and specific industries. These companies, through technology, are changing how these industries operate. Facebook is the world's largest media provider, yet it does not own any content. Uber is the world's largest provider of automobile transportation, yet it does not own any cars. Airbnb facilitates housing for more travelers around the world, yet it does not own buildings or properties. The people who create these companies, and ultimately employ workers, are high-skilled and consequently have job security in the modern economy.

The modern economy looks very different than it did a few decades ago in large part to technology. It is technology that has led to automation and a need for high-skilled workers in a high-tech workforce.

The best way to ensure the next generation is prepared to enter the workforce is to teach what is needed in the classroom, and ensure that classroom is located in an environment that embraces a technology-driven curriculum. Advancing technology continues to impact everyday life and it will become more even prevalent in shaping the lives and workforce of the next generation.

Rep. Don Vruwink represents the 43rd Assembly District, which includes parts of Rock, Walworth, Jefferson and Dane counties. He can be reached at Rep.Vruwink@legis.wi.gov and at 608-266-3790. The mailing address is P.O. Box 8953, Madison, WI 53708.

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